

Army Files on Civilians Hidden, Kept, Agents Say

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Three former Army intelligence agents have told the Knight Newspapers that their commanding officer secretly preserved hundreds of confidential civilian dossiers that the Army had ordered destroyed.

One of the agents said he later found a memorandum that revealed that the officer had turned some of the files over to a civilian law enforcement agency.

SENSITIVE DATA

According to the ex-agents, the files contained potentially sensitive information about individuals and organizations in the Chicago area and had been compiled by undercover Army spies as part of the runaway intelligence operation known as Continental United States Intelligence, or Conus Intel.

A source for the Senate subcommittee on constitutional rights, which has been investigating Army intelligence gathering, said it has reports that Army dossiers in cities other than Chicago still have not been destroyed and have found their way into non-military hands.

FILES HIDDEN

The three agents claim that, when the order came to destroy the Chicago files, Capt. Charles C. Smith, then commander of the Chicago field office of the 113th Military Intelligence Group, had the files hidden from the Army inspector general and later made the material available to the Illinois Bureau of Investigation.

Smith refused to respond to

the charges of the agents. Asked if he had done what the agents say he did, Smith said: "All I can say is to call the public information office" at Fort Holabird, Md., headquarters for military intelligence."

PROBES IN PROGRESS

A Pentagon spokesman said a "group was designated" to investigate Army intelligence activities in Illinois and in other areas.

"The board has not yet submitted its findings and recommendations," the spokesman continued. "Since this investigation is still in progress it would be inappropriate to provide further details at this time."

A spokesman for the IBI said he had no "personal" knowledge of the IBI receiving any Army files.

The agents' account of the disappearing files is the latest and strangest chapter in the unfolding story of Army spying and how it careened out of control.

SPYING HALTED

Under heavy pressure from Congress, the Army since has banned any form of spying on civilians and claims that all of the dossiers its agents compiled have either been destroyed or turned over to the Department of Justice.

Two of the ex-agents from the Chicago field office declined to have their names used, fearful of future reprisals by the government. They served in the Chicago area during 1969 and 1970 and recently both were discharged.

The third agent, Richard Stahl, now is a student at Bradley University in Peoria. He was discharged last year.